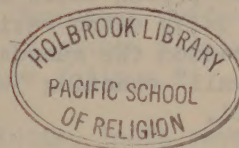


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A Vocation To Love

INSIDE PHILIPPINE BARBED WIRE

by Aiko CARTER

In a recent trip to the Philippines I met a woman who was referred to lovingly as "mommy" by everyone around her. Four days out of every week she makes a long trek to see her son who is incarcerated under the hot sun in the Bicutan Rehabilitation Center, Taguig, Metro-Manila.

She was 27 when her farming husband died. For 12 years after that she worked in the kitchen of the Society of the Divine Word Seminary in order to send her son to school. "Mommy" said, "whenever my son Fr. Ed spoke, people came to listen to him and the number of people always increased." As of Dec. 13, 1977 Ed will have been detained for three years without any formal charges against him.

I asked "mommy" whether I could go to see him in the prison. On an early Sunday morning, when the whole city was just beginning a four-day holiday period, she took me to the prison inspection office. While I was waiting for permission to get into the prison I soon found myself surrounded by many other younger mothers with small children who were also waiting their turn to fill in the formal visiting papers. A woman who stood beside me was holding a baby in one arm and in the other hand a bunch of bananas. Half of those bananas smelled bad and looked pretty old. She must have been forced to walk a long way to visit her husband.

What I saw was the true face of the martial law government spending incredibly large sums of money to suppress all forms of criticism or protest. From the window I could see many political prisoners waiting outside their bunker-like concrete buildings enclosed as they were by blockades and barbed wire. After obtaining official permission we walked toward the building where Ed and his friends were.

"Mommy" explained that the present prison conditions are a product of a very long struggle referring especially to the 75 day hunger strike that was waged between March and June. As a result they can cook their own meals using the full four peso allotment per person instead of the two peso amount getting to them before the strike. They also have retained the right to work making beautiful objects of art from the simplest things, such as soup bones. These bones are used in soup, then cracked and sanded against the concrete walls of the prison, polished smooth and made into pendants. Besides the pendants, there are illustrated compositions--poems and thoughts from prison by the prisoners themselves:

"The day we stop burning with love/ people will die of the cold"

"Love is a basket with five loaves and two fishes/ it's never enough
until you start to give it away"

MORE

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"In these darkest nights of our times/ Not everyone is asleep and deep in slumber; Many have remained awake and vigilant/ Under the light of the sickle-shaped moon/ Breaking the silence of darkness."

Life behind prison walls often revolves around the necessities of life--in this case, the daily water rations. Three times a day water is brought by the guards, but on occasion the guards neglect to come, and the prisoners form a human "waiting wall" chanting "water....water...." over and over again as they cling to the wall.

I had a chance to speak with the imprisoned people within the limited time allotted. A prisoner said: "Everytime we hear of people in other countries like Japan working for justice and its fruit--peace--our imprisonment acquires deeper meaning. It is not just a price we pay for our commitment to liberation in the Philippines; it becomes a seed of solidarity with other people's struggle in other lands.

"Everytime we meet people from other countries who not only struggle together with their own people, but also work to support the Philippine struggle, we learn again the Christian lesson that our vocation to love does not know any national boundaries."

"Thank you for pushing back our prison walls a little wider and warming our hearts with your visit and message. --Mabuhay Kayo!"

Another wrote:

"To Fellow Journalists of Japan:

"Warm greetings to you all from political prisoners in the Philippines! Special fraternal greetings from a press colleague who is now a political prisoner. Wherever they operate and under whatever conditions they work, journalists true to their calling always search and fight for the truth. One glaring truth of our times is the fact that giant monopoly companies in highly developed countries are increasing threats on the lives of other people in less developed countries through export of exploitive capital and the effect of industrial pollution.

"Unhappily, Japan is such a country guilty of this type of exploitation of other peoples. I understand that the fight of the Japanese people against national pollution and now against the export of industrial pollution, is ever growing strong and that Japanese journalists carry on the struggles too."

"In our country, hundreds of young men and women are being killed or imprisoned because they fight against foreign control of our economy and over the life of our people. We seek solidarity with all of you in Japan who fight to prevent such foreign control from expanding further. We hope that in our mutual cooperation we shall achieve the mutual protection and welfare of the Filipino and Japanese people."

Fr. Ed de la Torre and his friends would very much appreciate receiving your Christmas cards while they remain in prison, although no one ever knows whether or not they will actually receive them. But such a gesture gives them some degree of assurance that somebody in this world remembers them in prayer and they also feel that their lives will probably not be destroyed simply because they are completely unknown in the outside world. (If you would like detailed information, please contact Aiko Carter, care of the National Christian Council).

A BBC FILM ON THE PHILIPPINES will be shown in St. Ignatius Church, Yotsuya titled "Collision Course", Nov. 17 from 6 p.m.-8:30 p.m. After, Bishop Francisco CLAVER will give a talk on "Japan's Responsibility Towards Asian Neighbors--Development from the Third World Perspective." The public is invited.

"Unlocked Hearts"

VIEW FROM AN INDIAN VILLAGE

by WATANABE Seiko

(WATANABE Seiko recently returned from a year's study at the Ecumenical Christian Centre of Vicharodaya College in Bangalore, India as a Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) scholarship student. The program's aim was to awaken people to social problems, and train leaders in social action. Her report follows.)

Though it is only a few months since I came back from India, India seems far away. Returning to the abundance, convenience and cleanliness of Japan, I feel a dilemma.

India has many complicated political, economical, social and religious problems. They include the caste system, class system, overpopulation, unemployment and corruption.

Feel with me the degradation of being in the depths of poverty, alienated from human beings in the name of religion. The caste system impedes progress in Indian society because between 30 and 40 per cent of the total population are untouchables who are not treated as human beings, or even as servants of low caste. Like their ancestors, they have been bonded laborers restricted by debt, manual laborers making low salaries working under the worst conditions in factories and mines, or servants who have to work from morning to night without privacy just like cattle. No one can select the age, country or caste to which he belongs. However, what is life like for those who have to bear these indignities?

We in our college had village visits and projects along with our lectures. One day we visited a neighboring village near the college. We had not been to this village and did not have much connection with it except that a few women from there came to attend our sewing classes.

But we wanted to visit the houses of our students from this village. Nallur is a beautiful village endowed with a natural landscape of coconut and palm trees. In spite of the poverty and misery there, somehow the beauty and serenity added to nature's bounty of vast lands that surround this village. This captivated my mind and moved my heart. I wished to remain in that spot and spend the rest of my life there.

We had actually planned for this visit to last two hours as we had just a few houses to visit. First we went to a young woman's house; we wanted her to accompany us as a guide and show us the homes of other students. But she would not let us go. She insisted that we have coffee and prepared 21 cups of coffee and offered it to us with some sweets. Having given us a drink she seemed to be impatient, running around the place in search of something. After some time we saw her enter with a tray full of flowers for the girls. We sensed her satisfaction when she saw the girls distribute the flowers among themselves and put them in their hair. She then accompanied us to the other houses. Each home showed greater warmth in welcoming us. We were filled with their hospitality. Our stomachs were full, yet we could not afford to refuse their love.

The most striking among our hosts was a young poor widow. She is the mother of two children and is struggling hard to make a living. Seeing us enter the neighboring student's house, she had quickly prepared a savory dish and made ready the milk for us. We had hardly room enough to be seated in her house, but the pleasantness and warmth which she showed us moved our hearts. Her intention was to offer her best to us, though we felt quite bad to have given her much trouble. But we could not bear to see her hurt.

(/more....)

By now we had passed the time limit set for our visit and were an hour and a half late. We hurried back to reach the College so we would not inconvenience the kitchen staff. When we were half-way back somebody called out to us and ran towards us. We stopped and discovered another student who had been out cutting grass for her cattle when we went to her house. Hearing of our visit from her aged mother-in-law, she hurried to prepare some coffee and treats and seeing us leave the village, ran after us. She insisted that we go to her house and in spite of all our explanations, she persuaded us and took us to her house.

This village is engraved deeply on my mind. The people of that village lead simple lives, they have nothing precious to lock up, no ornaments, no furniture, no gorgeous clothing. Yet they have unlocked hearts burning with the fire of love and hospitality. They wanted to offer their best to their guests, much more than they could afford. That day also happened to be my birthday and this visit made it an unforgettable day in my life. The intensity of their human love moved me deeply.

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At Grassroots Level

JAPANESE-FILIPINO ENCOUNTER

by Armin and Evelyn KROEHLER

How can Asians cooperatively plan and carry out Christian Mission in Asia? This was the burning question asked by 19 Japanese Christians and three American missionaries, as they attended the Fourth Pacific Ecumenical Mission Conference in Manila Sept. 27-30. This annual conference is a grassroots movement spearheaded by Japanese ministers and lay persons from Tohoku, but the participants from Japan this year came all the way from Shimane to Hokkaido. They represented five different denominations. Rev. ENDO Sakae, Pastor of the Aizu-Takada Church, Kyodan, is president of the Pacific Ecumenical Mission Conference.

Speakers on the conference theme of "Christ in Asia: Hope of the World," included Dr. Antonio LEDESMA, director of the Centre for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia, Dr. Angelita LEDESMA, Dr. Cirilo RIGOS, pastor of the Ellinwood-Malate Church in Manila, Rev. TOEDA Yoshiaki, pastor of the People's Church in Sendai, and Bishop Alberto RAMENTO of the Philippine Independent Church.

Time was given for the discussion of numerous problems and how Church people could face these problems together. Perhaps the most crucial problem facing the Philippines and many other Southeast Asian countries is that of land reform. Millions of poor tenants barely eke out an existence. There is an urgent need to develop industry to lift the nation economically, and so short cuts are taken, as in the case of the building of the notorious Kawasaki Steel Plant in Mindanao, American and Japanese big businesses are making profits, while Filipinos seem to get less than their fair share. And the great gulf between the rich and the poor in the Philippines is quite evident. Compulsory education has been established, but only through the fourth grade, so far. The country's official language is Tagalog, but this is a strange language for parts of the Philippines other than the Manila area, and so the problem of unifying a nation is difficult.

Five years ago President Ferdinand MARCOS initiated martial law and still parliamentary rule is only a promise in the future. Political dissent is not allowed at present. Staunch supporters of Marcos and bitter critics are found inside the Church as well as outside.

On the religious scene, the Roman Catholic Church claims about 85 per cent of the population. The Philippine Independent Church has some 4,000,000 members,

(/more...)

and Protestants and Muslims make up most of the rest. One of the fastest growing sects is Iglesia ni Cristo, an indigenous group that rejects all other denominations.

During the course of the conference it became clear that the reason why more Filipinos did not attend (only eleven were directly involved) was the cost of attending the conference, which was held in a Manila hotel. Even though substantial help was offered the Filipino participants, it was still financially prohibitive for most of them to attend. Coming from Japan we were forced to realize in a new way how much we are to be identified with the "rich" of this world. In future conferences it is obvious that meetings must be held in church-related facilities within the reach of the local participants.

Participants from South Korea were expected at the conference, but they were unable to get their government's clearance in time to attend. The high cost of transportation no doubt kept other Asians from attending, as this conference is sponsored by no official organization, and each person must pay his or her own way.

On Oct. 1 the Japanese participants were privileged guests at the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of the Philippine Independent Church, formed in 1902 by Bishop Gregorio AGLIPAY and other Filipino priests who broke away from Rome. This "rebel" Church was animated by a sense of injustice as Filipino priests were regarded as a kind of second-class clergy. It was also deeply involved in the revolt against Spain at the close of the 19th century. Some of the reforms made in the P.I.C. included: the local dialect is used in the mass; the faithful are allowed to confess directly to God during the mass; and priests may marry. They closely cooperate with Anglican and old Catholic churches around the world.

The Diamond Jubilee was highlighted by a celebration of the Holy Eucharist and by a speech by President Marcos. The mass was conducted in Tagalog, the national language. Although women are not now ordained, several read scripture or prayers during the Eucharist.

President Marcos' speech emphasized nation-building, and the role that the Churches have in supporting national unity, social justice, economic development, and cultural coherence. One could feel he represented a deep patriotic spirit in this nation which had been a colony of Western nations for over 400 years. There was evident pride in Filipino culture and a feeling of hope for the future. At the same time one could not help but wonder whether the Churches were not being asked to make the nation a "god" to which they should be completely subservient.

On Oct. 2, World Communion Sunday, the Japanese team shared with congregations of the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the Philippine Independent Church, and the Protestant Chapel at the University of the Philippines. Filipinos, Japanese and Americans--kneeling together at Christ's table, receiving His forgiveness and forgiving each other--is not this the key to the future? For only in Christ can the great animosities and the overwhelming problems of our time be faced together and lasting solutions found.

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INTERDENOMINATIONAL GROUP MEDIA WORKSHOP---Don ROPER, Secretary of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) Group Media Development Committee will be the main figure in an interdenominational Group Media workshop in AVACO Mass Communication Center Nov. 15 and 16. Group media, or group communications makes use of any kind of media from lectures, film, tape, drama, music, song, story-telling, etc. in a group, as opposed to just a one-way communication as in T.V. or radio. Group media seeks a two way form of communication, emphasizes indigenous communication forms, aims at development of social consciousness and critical perspective.

(continued on page 6)

A Festival of Praise
TOHOKU MISSIONARY FELLOWSHIP

Secular youth have their rock festivals, and why should not the Church be more expressive of its joy and thankfulness? "Praise" was the theme and content of an ecumenical conference held at Morigo Camp near Sendai on Oct. 9 and 10. Forty-three Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries (including nine children of the latter) gathered from the six prefectures of the Tohoku area to sing, pray, read Scripture, and witness to the wonderful things God is doing in our time. The children shared in singing, playing chimes, and two of them, Iris and Margaret KROEHLER, in a creative dance to the musical version of the Prayer of St. Francis.

A Bible study led by Dr. Gilbert and Mrs. Cornelia SCHROER of Morioka, Father S. MURAKABE, Roman Catholic priest working in Izumi City, and Sister Frances KIRWAN, President of Sakura no Seibo Junior College, placed great emphasis on the Psalms as expressing the deep longings and vibrant praise of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. At the same time the coming of Christ brings a new dimension to praise. Bishop Seraphim SIGRIST of the Orthodox Church was away in the Soviet Union at the time of the conference, but he left tapes and an explanation of "praise in the Orthodox Tradition." Sister Maryke GERRETSEN of Fukushima led in a modern Roman Catholic "Liturgy of the Word," using guitar as accompaniment for the "new songs." Rev. Earl TAYLOR of the Assembly of God introduced the group to free, spontaneous type of "Praise in the Pentecostal Tradition." All were done with sensitivity and those present were able to rejoice in the wonderful variety of ways God has been working in the past and is working today. Christians have great richness--the best in each religious style.

At the same time that the participants were praising God, they were also brought to realize with shame how divided the Church remains. Father Murakabe related how he had asked a Protestant pastor whether he could hold Catholic services in the Protestant Church, in an area where there was no Catholic Church. He felt this would be a witness to the community of the unity of Christ's church. He referred to Matthew 5:16--"Let your light shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and give praise to your Father in heaven." However the Father's request was refused.

"Catholic priests would no doubt do the same if a Protestant minister asked for the use of Catholic facilities," said Father Murakabe. "This indicates how far we are from true unity."

Thus humbled, those who shared in the conference felt a new longing for unity in Christ, for His renewing Spirit, and for opportunities for cooperative witness.

* * * * *

Roper's extensive trip to Asia includes India, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Philippines where he will observe current projects on groups/group media and take part in discussions, seminars, meetings towards the development of group media in Asia.

Some interesting sub-titles for this coming workshop (picked at random):
(1) Jesus as an unorthodox communicator (2) Giving attention to the soil/
audience (3) Church's pastoral task is community development (4) Fellowship
fails when communication fails (5) Emergence of the Group Work Movement
(a) alliance with psychology and human potential movement (5) Emergence of
Development Communication.

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